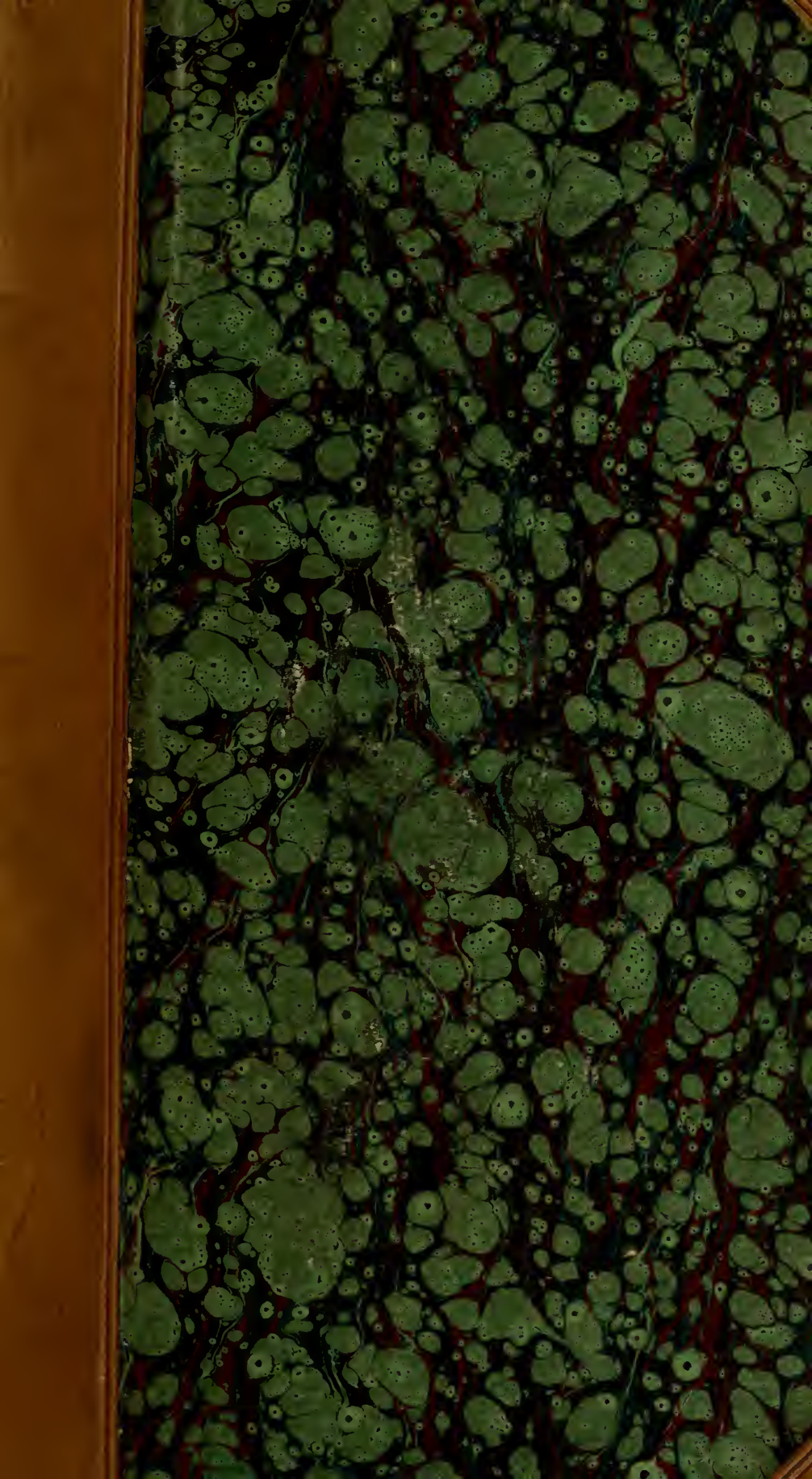






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THE
GODDESSES IN CONGRESS

AT
OLYMPUS-ON-SPREE.

"Tantane animis cœlestibus ira."

PUBLISHED BY
E. W. ALLEN, 11, AVE MARIA LANE
AND
STATIONERS' HALL COURT, E.C.

1878.

THE GODDESSES IN CONGRESS.

Dramatis Personæ.

- JUNO. The Spouse of Jove; allowed to be
 Second to none in dignity.
- MINERVA. Goddess of Wisdom and of Might;
 Approved with "blood and iron" to fight.
- VENUS. Goddess of Beauty, Grace and Wit;
 By Pallas, lately, hard was hit.
- THETIS. Goddess of Ocean, strong and free;
 Holds the dominion of the Sea.
- PROSERPINE. Goddess of Hades; reign'd of old
 In Darkness and Cimmerian Cold.
- HEBE. Goddess of Youth; inscrib'd of late
 Upon the list of "Goddesses Great."
- ISIS. An Eastern Goddess; once did roam,
 But feels in Europe scarce at home.

[All the *Dramatis Personæ* discovered, standing.]

- PROSERPINE. Now that we've met in Congress, you're aware
 The first thing is—that some one take the
 Chair.
- HEBE. I vote for Proserpine.

JUNO. I think you'll see,
Upon reflection, it belongs to me.
I am the oldest.

HEBE. "Crabbéd Age and Youth!"

JUNO. What's that you're mutt'ring?

HEBE. Well, to say the truth,
I don't see *age* should such a point decide.

JUNO. Doubtless you think that *you* ought to preside!
Forward young hussy!

HEBE. Pray don't call me names.
You know I've never yet put forth such claims.
It's true I'm used to handing round the wine;
But,—a Chair-woman!—no that's not my line!

MINERVA. Hebe, my dear,—Within Olympus' portals
There are no *women*,—they are vulgar mortals.
If a "Great Power"—a Goddess—you would be;
Learn wisdom—and your choice of words—
from me.

As for this question of the senior seat,—
Since your Divinities have deigned to meet
In my *boudoir*, I'll say but this alone,—
I'll take the Chair,—on grounds that are my
own.

VENUS. Grounds of your own!—but it's beyond a joke
To seat yourself on grounds of other folk :—
Alsace-Lorraine to wit!

MINERVA. An error vital!

“Elsass-Lothringen” is its olden title ;—
Teutonic !—

VENUS. Oh ! we know you’re up in
“ologies,”

They are for robbery but poor apologies.
Claiming the right to name my own domain,
I’ll (*pace* Freeman) say “Alsace-Lorraine.”

PROSERPINE. This is beside the mark,—

VENUS. Beside the Rhine,
You’d better say ; I tell you they are mine.

PROSERPINE. Nay, peace !

VENUS, *Eh, bien ! J’attends !*

PROSERPINE. Come to the question.
I think Minerva made a good suggestion.

JUNO. Thetis, what think you ? You’ve not said a
word.

THETIS. I think this wrangling childish and absurd.
If Congress ’tis, just let these matters be ;—
We’re not in Seine, but here upon the Spree.
Now Treaties are considered so elastic,
For Congresses I’m not enthusiastic.

PROSERPINE. Hands up—No, that’s not classical, methinks ;
Immortals shew their wills by nods and winks.
What is it Horace says,—

HEBE. The line you meant, is
“*Cuncta supercilio moventis.*”

PROSERPINE. That's it exactly,—*Arch brows*, ladies, pray
For Pallas !—So !—All vote in the same way,
(Including Venus, who *bends* hers)—that's
carried.

Then take thy Chair of Honour, Great Un-
married.

(*The Goddesses take their seats; Minerva presiding.*)

MINERVA. Well, now,—to business straight, *secundum*
morem,

We must renew, I fear me, a *dolorem*
That's most unpleasant;—not to speak at
random,

It's one that must be thought of as *infandum*:--
(We've high authority to call the Turk
“ Unspeakable ” you know)—well, that's our
work !

The Eastern Question's rapping (horrid ghost!)
And wants an answer by return of post !
This Turk Unspeakable is, at this crisis,
Here represented by Egyptian Isis,
And she (who doubtless her own business
knows)

With Proserpine exchanged, but lately, blows;
But, getting worsted in th' unequal barter,
In Tartarus's Queen has “ caught a Tartar.”—
The eloquence to picture is not mine,
How our disinterested Proserpine

Gave freely blood and wealth the weak to aid,—
 So (naturally) wants, now, to be paid.
 When Politics get into such a maze,
Beati possidentes seems the phrase.

PROSERPINE. Most aptly spoken !

THETIS. That *may* mean, I'm told,
 Happy are they who own "men, ships, and gold,"
 In that case I congratulate my nation.

PROSERPINE. I don't think Pallas hinted *that* translation;—
 Rather, I think, "that each kept what she had,
 By hook or crook ;" and I should be most glad
 To guarantee *you* this.

THETIS. Thanks Proserpine ;
 I like, myself, to guarantee what's mine.
 As for your terms, we know you undertook
 To free Bulgaria, quite on your own *hook* ;—
 And for your *crook*,—it thus has pleased the
 Fates,—
 Your crooked ways have brought you to the
 Straits.

PROSERPINE. But, Thetis, why of *me* this sad suspicion?—
 I but performed a conscientious mission.

THETIS. When interest and duty coincide,
 'Tis well to know for what they are allied.

PROSERPINE. Have you not scann'd with care each narrow
 pinch,—
 Jealously watch'd my every onward inch
 In Turkey?

THETIS. Prudence thus to watch compels,
That Turkish inches don't mean Dardanelles.

PROSERPINE. I don't know why I should be "sat upon."

THETIS. You say your armour Conscience buckled on ;—
Then just continue in consistent strain,
And let your Conscience take it off again.

PROSERPINE. Was it for this I left my Pluto's halls ?

THETIS. Is it for this you threaten Stamboul's walls ?

PROSERPINE. To please you, I forbade my troops go nigher,—

THETIS. By "special message." They *advanced* by
"wire."

MINERVA. Come, Sister Goddesses, as President,
I cannot say I think this time well spent ;—
Eh, Hebe ?

HEBE. Just so. It makes little odds
To me, how things go ; so the other gods
Are satisfied. The Adriatic Sea
Belongs (as all will own) by right to me :—
So that is taken for granted.

JUNO. How do *you* know?
Perhaps there may be some small share for
Juno.

What have you for this new-found claim to
show.

HEBE. My yachts—*Duilio* and *Dandolo*.

JUNO. Mistake not youth for strength,—nor trust
to them ;—

"Ex *pede* (not 'ex *Hebe*') *Herculem*."

MINERVA. Fair Hebe, moderate your youthful fire ;
 And, Juno, pray restrain your haughty ire.
 See Isis, here,—in spite of all her woes—
 Sits like a monument of calm repose.—
 How feel you, Isis, after all your trouble ?

ISIS. *Kismet!*—I would I had my hubble-bubble !

MINERVA. No smoking in *boudoir* divine's allowed.

ISIS. Divine!—would 'twere Divan ! I'd raise a
 cloud.

Oh ! for a puff of fragrant Latakia !—

Come, just one pipeful—there's a *Bona Dea*.

THETIS. Leave clouds, and come to earth.

ISIS. Fast-tied, fast-bound !—
 See *Czargrad* rise, while *Stamboul* falls to
 ground !

Betrayed by former friends, bereft, forlorn !

My Sacred Cow scarce keeps her Golden Horn.

THETIS. (*aside*) The Horn by Hornby's kept. (*aloud*) Not
 quite alone—

Your native Egypt still is all your own.

ISIS. She, too, with "bonds" is hamper'd, hand
 and foot.

THETIS. She breaks her bonds, and "breaks," herself,
 to boot.

MINERVA. Bluntly,—to business—why these bickerings
 vain?

Let things be put before us, plump and plain !

Plainness I like !—What's that you whisper,
Venus ?

Merely a little *mot* that passed between us.

MINERVA. Then tell the Chair.

VENUS. 'Twas, that your exclamation,—
“Plainness I like”—was gross self-approbation.

MINERVA. Ha ! Plainness ! Bluntness ! Yes, they both
are mine.

VENUS. Beauty and Sharpness are more in my line.

MINERVA. Beware ! *Væ victis!* Hazard not a taunt.

VENUS. Alas ! at Jena I, too, made that vaunt ;
Now, I repent,—and shall—till I regain
My lost *prestige*,—my loved Alsace-Lorraine !

JUNO. Pallas, don't lose your temper, nor time
waste ;

It's not in a Sedan Chair you are placed.

Come, quickly,—and as bluntly as you please!--

MINERVA. Goddesses all, the points are simply these:—
First,—Proserpine, promulge on what con-
dition

You'll deem you have discharged your sacred
mission.

PROSERPINE. Well,—I and Isis (not to trouble you)
Have settled all the points but one or two.
We've torn up —this one gain from her
defeat is—
Vain documents that mortals call their
Treaties.

Thank Fates ! I no more, now I've crossed
 the Styx,
 Shall hear of "Seventy-one" or "Fifty-six,"
 Nor Treaty,—or of Paris, or of London,—
 Such silly compacts, once for all, are undone.
 You can't for nothing scratch your neighbour's
 face ;

So Isis pays the whole costs of the case.
 The dwellers by the Styx will now be free
 To live just as it pleases them,—and me.
 We're anxious, both, to benefit Bulgaria,
 So we've agreed to give her a good area,—
 Much land and many people,—and in fact,
 To make her independent, strong, compact.
 My under-nymph, Roumania, overflows
 With gratitude to me,—so I propose
 (Lest I should seem her love to underrate)
 T'accept a slice of family estate
 We alienated once, in times of yore,
 Called Bessarabia, on the Euxine shore,
 By Styx's mouth ; for which, we shall arrange
 That Isis gives some trifle in exchange.
 For dear Bulgaria anxious, I have made
 Arrangements for her sons with mine to trade ;
 Her ports shall open to the Euxine gales,
 Ægean breezes fill her frequent sails.
 In me is vested (by our mutual wish)
 The right upon the Styx to row and fish,

The first, when fine, so pleasant for my daughters,—

THETIS. (*aside*) While *you* yourself can fish in troubled waters.

PROSERPINE. Well!—that's all comfortably settled so,
By private Treaty at San Stefano:—
Upon one trifling point we thought 'twere nice
To ask the Goddesses their joint advice,—
You, Juno, doubtless, recollect the Strait
Jove swam, with fair Europa,—'tis the gate
'Twixt the Propontis and the Euxine Sea,—

JUNO. Yes;—of that gate 'twas settled that the key
By Isis should be kept.

PROSERPINE. Exactly,—well—
Isis is tired of answering the bell,
And so has given me a duplicate
With which I, too, can ope for all the gate;
Still, knowing folks were jealous, we agreed
'Twere best a Congress ratified the deed.
To this there can be no objection strong;
Nor is it aught that need detain us long.

MINERVA. Who wants to speak?

THETIS. I.

VENUS. I.

JUNO. And I.

HEBE. And I.

MINERVA. Ye shriek like blackbirds in the opened pie.

Thetis, speak first; the waves you claim to rule.
What of the Straits that ripple by Stamboul?

THETIS. First, I object to Proserpine (like Horner)
Pulling her fav'rite plums out, in a corner;
A Congress, formed of Goddesses like us,
May claim th' entire question to discuss.
When first with Isis she began to fight,
'Twas "to defend the weak," "to aid the right,"
No thought of territory, she averr'd,
Or gain, was hers;—Now, has she kept 'her
word?

PROSERPINE. It's very hard, when I fulfil my mission,
My actions should be viewed with such sus-
picion.

Did I not say of land I wished no more?

THETIS. You did,—and you have said the same
before.

PROSERPINE. Come, Thetis,—can you think I would
deceive a
Friend like yourself?

THETIS. I only answer 'Khiva'!

PROSERPINE. O, stop! you shouldn't fling that in my face.

THETIS. You gave your word you wouldn't hold the
place.

PROSERPINE. Ah, yes!—it's true that something of the
kind

My little boy said; but *that* could not bind

A Gortschakoff, or even a commander
Of enterprise.

THETIS. Then, why let Alexander
Brew the material of a future storm,
By undertaking what he can't perform ?

PROSERPINE. 'March of events,' you see,—things wont
keep still !

THETIS. Events have always marched,—they always
will.—

Another point,—Isis is going to pay
Th' expenses of your journey :—how much,
pray ?

PROSERPINE. Well, as I am by nature somewhat thrifty,
I put the total at about two-fifty
Millions ;—but not wishing her to 'smash,'
I shall not harshly press for all in cash ;
So, this is the arrangement we have made,—
She mortgages Armenia,—till it's paid.

THETIS. Then, I should say, it wouldn't be far wrong
To guess your lease is likely to be long ;
She'll, doubtless, pay (if not on Kalends Greek)
Some Sunday in the middle of the week !
"No land ! no gain ;—disinterested glory !"
How suits the new edition of the story ?
Deem you, Batoum is destined for your Czars ?—
Their triumphs incomplete without their Kars ?

PROSERPINE. A mere security ! That's settled !

JUNO. Stay !

I, too, on land, have just a word to say :—
Your ‘ family estate,’—

PROSERPINE. Yes, Ceres’ own,
My mother’s, hence the wondrous corn-crops
grown !

JUNO. Ay, but this piece of land towards the South,
Unfortunately’s at the river’s mouth
That through my garden runs ;—which, it is
clear,

With ‘ trips to the sea-side ’ will interfere.
And how can I so cheaply get my toys,
Or cotton pinafores for all my boys ?—
While you will always have the chance to
bring
Actions against me for their trespassing,
(Unruly lads they are, as e’er were born);
’Twill interfere, too, with my fav’rite corn,—
So, on’t I set my foot.

PROSERPINE. Here, wait a minute,
Don’t be so hasty to put your foot in it.—
There are some lands that next your garden
lie,—

The very thing your hedge to ‘rectify’,—
And Isis, I am sure, apart from force,
Would give it ; wouldn’t you, Isis ?

ISIS. Oh, of course.

To hear is to obey !

MINERVA (*aside*) Then, when not *fearing*,
She must be wonderfully hard of hearing.

JUNO. I don't know what to think,—you're very
kind,—

But,—

HEBE. While she's making up her dual mind,
Just say what slice for me you've set aside.

THETIS. (*aside*) The Treaties.

HEBE. I'll say if I'm satisfied.

PROSERPINE. You see,—there's not much left,—or, to be
plainer,

You'll only be *in general* a gainer.

HEBE. Thank you, but since for spoil there seems
a mania,

Why not for me Epirus or Albania?—

I've an old claim on Tunis,—that might do,—
Convenient half-way house for Timbuctoo.

MINERVA. Hebe, you still are very young, you know,
There's time enough before you still to grow.

HEBE. Young!—pooh!—don't talk to me in that
sage way!

You're the creation but of yesterday.

MINERVA. I sprang full-grown to life!—Jove's brain
my home!

My title is an old one,—

HEBE. Filch'd from Rome.

VENUS. Aye but, young nymph (I must not say
'young woman')

She's *Pan-Teutonic* now,—not Holy Roman!

MINERVA. None of your quips here, Venus,—don't be
stupid ;—

I am too much for you, as well as Cupid.

Is this the way you prove your friendship's
hearty,

In pressing me to join your garden-party?—

Now,—list, all, to the Chair!—I shan't be
long :—

I need not, now, remind you that I'm strong,

And hence you may be sure I shall not shrink

From speaking out exactly what I think.—

“High motives”—“freedom”—all that's very
pleasant

For Proserpine to tell a docile peasant,—

Or the marines,—but, among us, 'twon't do

To try that “high falutin’”;—*Entre nous*,

Fighting's expensive ; and she wouldn't try it,

Unless she thought that she could profit by it.

Well,—she has fought, and she has gained the
day ;—

Let Kars and Bessarabia be her pay ;

In other hands she leaves the Stygian plain,

So Juno need not fear for her domain,—

JUNO. Yes, but she may be up to her old tricks ;—
She has the Poles,—then why come near the
Styx ?

MINERVA. You must not let it come within her clutch.
Then,—Thetis' interests she does not touch.
Nile's fertile vale she does not take,—

THETIS. She can't.

MINERVA. Nor holds poor Isis's boats in pledge,—

THETIS. She shan't.

MINERVA. Stamboul she enters not, although so nigh,—

THETIS. I keep a boat or two, *in case*, close by ;—
Of course we need not trace a motive thence ;
It's what we call a "strange coincidence."

MINERVA. Remains the question,—“What about the
Key?”

(As for the Turk, right glad we'd be to see
Him—*pace* Gladstone—out of Coventree !)

I will say to th' opinion I incline
That no one need complain of Proserpine ;
So none will do so, since that is my view ;—
I'm strong, I said ;—I'm independent, too.

THETIS. Excuse me, Pallas,—I will speak my mind ;—
You independent ?—nothing of the kind !—
What obligations for the past you feel,
You best know,—but the fact you can't conceal.
Strong you are, 'gainst a foe that's single-
handed,

But rightly shrink from two together banded ;—
Strong, and, to imitate your bluntness fully,
A little bit inclined to play the bully.
You well know Venus for revenge is greedy,

And that it still may come,—though *claudio pede*.

Think not to threat the Mistress of the Seas,
For Thetis both your strength and weakness
sees.

You *dare* not plans of Proserpine withstand,
And, in this game, have played up to her hand.
Shall I to *your* vote, then, entrust my fate?—
You shall not, here, between us arbitrate!
Let Goddesses, then, learn my judgment so:—
Strong? yes, you are! but, *independent?*—No!

MINERVA.

Most unbecoming, this, to one so great!—
It's language that I have not heard of late.

THETIS.

'Twould seem,—though vowing you admire
the tone—

You like the bluntness on one side alone.—
But now,—a truce to this—Here is the ques-
tion,—

Whether the Congress bow to your suggestion—
That Proserpine tear Treaties into shreds,
And fling the fragments at our baffled heads?—
For instance—in this matter of the Bosphorus,—
That gain be all for her, and only loss for us;
That Isis nominally keep the key
That opes the gateway of the Euxine Sea,
Giving the other leave to pick her pocket,
Whenever Hades' Queen it suits to lock it.
Isis, just now, we all beheld succumb,
Held tight beneath the Proserpinal thumb;—

'Tis *therefore* the Propontis bears my fleets,
And "*Alexandra*" Alexander meets.

PROSERPINE. Now peace is signed, what are your ships
there doing?

THETIS. They're on the spot in case of mischief
brewing.

PROSERPINE. Had I been Isis I'd have kept them out.

THETIS. 'Tis not your fault she fail'd to, I've no doubt.

PROSERPINE. Gallipoli,—why do you keep them there?

THETIS. Why do your people prowl around Bulair?

PROSERPINE. Why do you want six millions, ready money?

THETIS. You are the last who ought to think that
funny.

PROSERPINE. When will your fleets receive the word to
go?

THETIS. When do you hope to quit San Stefano?

PROSERPINE. I did the work; I mean to have my way.

THETIS. Nobody asked you;—I must have my say.

PROSERPINE. Provoke me not,—you'll find me quite your
match.

THETIS. A Tartar true —on coming to the scratch!

PROSERPINE. To benefit the Slav is all I seek.

THETIS. The greater reason I support the Greek.

HEBE. Are these to rank the Goddesses among?

MINERVA. No, it's decided that they're still too young

Children are apt to be too loud and pert
At dinner; so they come in at dessert
(If they are good) to have some cake and
wine.—

And, come! reflect upon it, Proserpine,
I think you'll own, on looking at it twice,
Your've cut your *protégée* too large a slice.—

JUNO. Then, Bessarabia,—it's a shabby trick
The pocket of a close ally to pick.

PROSERPINE. Juno, 'tis not for you such things to say;
I've put a rather good thing in *your* way.
Am I to fare so far in foreign lands,
And then go home again with empty hands?
Shall I to feed poor Cerberus prepare,
And,—like Dame Hubbard—find the cupboard
bare?

VENUS. Nay,—the Parisian Treaty still can bind:—
A sop for Cerb'rus you must elsewhere find.

MINERVA. Oh! that's all past and gone,—you speak too
late—

“Judgment of Paris,” now, is out of date.

VENUS. Aye!—“to the Fairest” seems, now quite
absurd;

“Prize to the most Unfair” seems more the
word.

Thetis, I hold by you!

MINERVA. In times of need,

To "give and take" we all must be agreed.

VENUS. Th' interpretation Proserpine thus makes,—
She *gives* Dobrudscha,—Bessarabia *takes*.

PROSERPINE. Why should I thus be twitted with my
spoil;

And why not *some* reward for all my toil?
Why all this jealousy about the Straits?—
And talk of ships, torpedoes, keys and gates?

THETIS I will not, in obedience to 'brag'
On the free seas consent to lower my flag.
Hindoos to me than Slavs are yet more near,—
My road to India, then, I *must* keep clear;
(Her conqueror, of old, they say, was Bacchus,—
Alas! I fear he has not ceased t'attack us)
To Proserpine I will not give a chance
Against my Indian Empire to advance;
Let others quarrel for the Stygian plain,—
Know Thetis, still, unrivalled rules the main.

MINERVA. Goddesses all, I feel quite sure that none
Can think, but that we are not quite at one.
Thetis, we see, to move her fleet declines,
While Proserpine keeps troops in Stamboul's
lines.—

And Proserpine insists her troops shall stay.
While Thetis' ships still hold the water-way:—
Let Thetis, then, consent to move her fleet,
And Proserpine give signal for retreat.

Let either Goddess keep her anger cool,
And each alike withdraw from doom'd Stam-
boul.

Would we have Peace for War, and Joy for
Sorrow?

Adjourn we then our Congress till to-morrow!



